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### **Obama to Propose Graduation Goal and \$12-Billion in Programs for 2-Year Colleges**

[By SARA HEBEL](#)

President Obama will call on the nation's community colleges today to produce five million more graduates by the year 2020 and will propose spending \$12-billion over 10 years to improve programs, courses, and facilities at two-year institutions, White House officials said on Monday.

The president's announcement, scheduled for this afternoon at [Macomb Community College](#), northeast of Detroit, propels community colleges to an unusually prominent position in the federal higher-education policy arena.

Mr. Obama's plans would have to be adopted by Congress to take effect. Administration officials said they expected the community-college proposals to be considered as part of broader higher-education legislation Congress will take up over the next few weeks to overhaul student lending and make other changes in student-aid policy. That legislation could free up billions of dollars for student-aid programs and the administration's community-college proposals if Congress goes along with the president's plan to end the bank-based guaranteed-loan program.

The goal President Obama will set today for moving more people through two-year campuses is a means to achieving the broader benchmark he established earlier this year for the United States to have the world's highest proportion of college graduates by 2020, James Kvaal, special assistant to the president for economic policy, said in a briefing with reporters on Monday evening.

The proposals also reflect the president's view "of the centrality of community colleges in providing higher-education opportunities and promoting higher levels of educational achievement," Mr. Kvaal said.

#### **Grants for Promising Practices**

Most of the money the president is proposing to spend on community colleges—about \$9-billion—would go toward creating two grant programs for two-year campuses and states to test promising programs and practices, including those designed to improve student learning and training, increase completion rates, and better track student progress.

A "challenge grant" program would award funds on a competitive basis to community colleges that planned to put in place new partnerships, training, student services, and other programs that have proved promising, Mr. Kvaal said.

White House officials want to use the "challenge grants" for a number of purposes, he said, including to help community colleges work with businesses to develop curricula that can better

meet employers' needs; to foster closer connections among community colleges, four-year colleges, and high schools to align requirements and make it easier for students to transfer academic credit; and to help community colleges improve remedial education for students who need extra help to prepare for college-level work and adult education.

The second program President Obama will propose is an "access and completion fund," according to the White House. That program, too, will give money to community colleges to test promising ideas, such as providing performance-based scholarships to reward students who make progress toward graduation. It will also make money available to states to, among other things, help them develop data systems to track student progress at community colleges and to measure campuses' graduation rates and the employment outcomes for their students.

### **Money for Facilities**

On another front, the president will propose providing \$2.5-billion to help community colleges repair and upgrade their facilities. Administration officials said they estimated that the money would spark a total of \$10-billion in construction at two-year institutions because the federal funds could be used to support other spending on facilities. For example, the federal dollars could pay interest on bonds or loans, start fund raising for capital projects, or open revolving-loan funds in states.

"Many community colleges were built decades ago, and they have outdated facilities," Mr. Kvaal said. That's a barrier to technical training, he said, and means that many campuses suffer from a lack of classroom space.

Finally, the president plans to propose using federal funds to bring together experts to develop online course materials that are designed to improve student learning, including through multimedia courses and other interactive technologies. The courses would be made available at no cost to students and others through community colleges and the Department of Defense's Advanced Distributed Learning Initiative, which has worked to identify and develop information technologies that advance learning.

Gail O. Mellow, president of La Guardia Community College, part of the City University of New York system, called the president's planned announcement "an extraordinary moment" for community colleges and said the level of federal spending being proposed would be "a game changer" for institutions like hers.

"For the first time, the federal government is recognizing that community colleges are really the bedrock," she said.

Ms. Mellow said the money could not come at a better time for her institution, which she said is "bursting at the seams." She said she especially welcomed the focus on data gathering and hoped that the president's plan would lead to the development of national gauges to track the five million students who are enrolled in noncredit courses at community colleges.

Most states and the federal government do not keep information about students in those courses and how well institutions prepare them for jobs, Ms. Mellow said. Giving community colleges a way to measure how well they help those students, she said, "would make an extraordinary difference."